

W r e s t l i n g

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Vince McMahon: Steroid Leader or Follower?

By - Skolnick & MacArthur

His supporters and detractors have called Vince McMahon a visionary, a trailblazer and a trendsetter in the world of professional wrestling. He is credited with redefining wrestling during the eighties. Much of what we as fans know wrestling in the United States to be today - whether good or bad - is either directly or indirectly the result of McMahon's promotional philosophy and efforts. Among his many credits and accomplishments are creating the Rock and Wrestling Connection, capitalizing on pay-per-view while the technology was in its infancy, destroying the wrestling feudal territory system, attracting positive mainstream media attention to the business, and pushing muscle-bound body-builders as the business' top draws. With the last one, came an increased use in a controlled substance known as anabolic steroids; the use and distribution of which in the World Wrestling Federation between 1988 and 1991 is currently jeopardizing the future of McMahon, Titan Sports, Inc. and the WWF.

McMahon's influence over the direction of the WWF and the entire wrestling business in the U.S. began while his father, Vince McMahon Sr., still owned the then-parent company of the WWF, Capital Sports, Inc. In November 1983, six months before his father's death, McMahon started the WWF's national expansion, which would force dozens of regional promotions to close down over the next few years. Among those to sign with the WWF were several well-built wrestlers, including Paul Orndorff, David Schultz, and of course, Hulk Hogan. In January 1984, Hogan squashed then-WWF Champion, the Iron Sheik, and became the company's number one box office attraction for over nine years and five title reigns. During Hogan's run as the WWF's top drawing card, McMahon primarily pushed wrestlers with bodybuilder physiques; most of which were enhanced by steroids. Among the top drawing cards for McMahon during this nine-year period were the Ultimate Warrior, the Legion of Doom, the Powers of Pain, Hercules, Rick Rude, Randy Savage, a pumped-up Don Muroco, a bloated Davey Boy Smith and dozens of other wrestlers who appeared to have enhanced their physiques with steroids. At the same time, many other wrestlers enjoyed considerable success with McMahon without looking like a Greek god. Dusty Rhodes, King Kong Bundy, Yokozuna, and Earthquake John Tenta are prime examples. Yet many other wrestlers, who appeared to be in good physical condition, may have used steroids. Mike Rotunda, who received Federal Express packages from convicted steroid distributor George Zahorian has enjoyed two successful runs in the past eight years, yet based on appearance alone, few would label him a steroid freak. Several other wrestlers, such as Arn Anderson, Roddy Piper Ted DiBiase, the Rockers, Tully Blanchard, Jake Roberts and Ric Flair, regardless of whether they took steroids, did not have the classic steroid look, and still received a substantial push in the WWF.

An avid bodybuilder, McMahon admitted he took steroids and opened up a now defunct bodybuilding company, which despite claims of being steroid free, was nothing of the sort. In the WWF, if a wrestler took steroids, he had an advantage over others competing for the few spots on the WWF roster. But obtaining a body of an Adonis was not the only qualification necessary to gain employment in Titan Sports. It is not known if wrestlers were overtly forced to take steroids in order to work for the WWF. However, such phrases as "gain 20 pounds" have been often quoted. If you look at several wrestlers hired by the promotion in recent years, including the Steiners, Sid Vicious/Justice, Lex Luger and Crush to name a few, they did not experience noticeable increases in size upon entering the WWF. Yet, these wrestlers, all of whom have the mid-eighties WWF look, did not experience noticeable decreases in size after spending time in the WWF, even after the drug testing policy had been implemented. Prior to the Titan drug policy, several wrestlers experienced significant increases in size upon entering the WWF, such as Shane Douglas, Davey Boy Smith and the Undertaker. Thus, while the implicit message in the WWF between 1984 and 1990 was use steroids if you want to work here, was that the overt message? If so, does it really make a difference? If wrestlers felt forced to take a steroids to enhance their physiques, which was a crime during

the mid-eighties, perhaps they should have looked elsewhere for employment. On the flip side, the case can be made that some wrestlers were told to get off the juice in the past two years and instead left the company or were fired. This is not to say if McMahon or the WWF told wrestlers to use steroids that they should go unpunished, but to single out McMahon for a problem that was, and - in far more cases than the mainstream media will admit - is still prevalent in not only wrestling, but the sporting world, is simply wrong.

As stated earlier, McMahon has been called a visionary, but that only applies to professional wrestling. Was he the first to push size and power over expertise and skill? Take a look at almost any sport during the past 10 years and what do you see? Baseball, basketball, football, hockey, track and field, tennis and many others have become power sports. The prototype athlete is one of tremendous strength, speed and chemical engineering. Could the athletes of 30 or 40 years ago compete with today's athletes? In some sports, perhaps. Taken as a whole, however, the answer is no. The athletes of days gone by would be physically manhandled in most sports. Technology and training have improved. So have the use of illegal performance enhancers - in particular, steroids. In some cases, in excess.

A center or power forward on an NBA team can no longer just be a good shooter or rebounder to survive. Today's stars must be able to give and take an elbow to the face, get in the paint, force themselves under the basket and physically battle for the ball. With the exceptions of Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell, are there any players of the sixties who could survive under these circumstances today? It is the same in most every sport today. The best tennis players have blazing serves. Female tennis stars often have better developed arms than their male fans. The best baseball players are either the power hitters, or the men with dazzling speed who can run the bases. Is there a catcher of 30 years ago

that could throw out a blazing Ricky Henderson or Deon Sanders? Meanwhile, the scrappy, hard workers of yesterday are being phased out for the specialist. In football, fullbacks of today are as big as the linemen of 10 years ago. The legendary Washington Redskins offensive line, better known as the Hogs, ruled the NFL during the early eighties with their size and strength. At the time, the Hogs were the largest offensive line in the NFL. The Hogs, if they were playing today, would be the smallest offensive line in the NFL. How do these athletes become so strong and quick? Better workout regimens, better diets, and increased knowledge about training are factors. So are illegal steroids. Even if there is not a player in the NFL, NBA, or Major League Baseball taking steroids today, somewhere along the line, many of these players took them and have experienced their long-term physical benefits; namely, increased strength, size and speed. That applies not only to wrestling, but to every sport where the aforementioned three assets are necessary for success.

Is McMahon any worse than a college or professional coach that wants his athletes to be the biggest and the strongest and tells them to "gain 20 pounds" any way they can? Absolutely not. Is he any better? Absolutely not. Furthermore, consider this comparable scenario. How many wrestlers have been suspended for failing a WWF drug test? The number, most educated fans believe is far fewer than the number of wrestlers who actually failed the drug test. How many NFL stars have been suspended for failing a drug test? Several. How many of them were Pro Bowlers? Three come to mind: Mark Duper, Dexter Manley and Lawrence Taylor. One of them, former Miami Dolphins wide receiver Mark Duper, never even failed a drug test. He was merely photographed with a bag that appeared to contain cocaine. Have only two NFL Pro Bowlers ever used illegal drugs, including steroids? Probably not. Have only two NFL Pro Bowlers ever tested positive in the NFL's closed drug

tests? Probably not. Sound familiar? To wrestling fans it should.

Then the question is why was McMahon indicted and not the owners in the NFL, NBA, Major League Baseball and any other organized sport? One, despite claims to the contrary, the WWF is not nearly as large or as powerful as the three major sports. Two, with the conviction of Zahorian, McMahon became an easy target. Even though Joe Weider's bodybuilding organization is a more likely target for illegal steroid distribution, once Zahorian was found guilty, it became easier to pursue his clients. McMahon never denied he received steroids from Zahorian, and the trial transcripts show overt steroid distribution in the WWF lockerrooms occurred for several years. Third, like Zahorian, McMahon and the WWF may be the test case. Since Dr. Zahorian was convicted of 12 counts, including wrongful distribution of steroids without just medical cause on June 27, 1991, several doctors who distributed steroids for sports performance enhancement have been indicted, including the distributor for former Olympic Track and Field star, Ben Johnson. If McMahon is convicted, it will establish a legal precedent, making much easier to indict and convict promoters and owners of more lucrative sporting ventures.

Reviewing the indictment, it doesn't look all that bad for McMahon. During the nearly 10 years that McMahon has run the WWF, the federal prosecutors have only charged him with two criminal counts and the WWF with two criminal counts. If steroid abuse as wide-spread as some have suggested, McMahon must consider himself a lucky man. Will McMahon be acquitted, or will he be found guilty, taken to prison and force the WWF to go out of business? It's anybody's guess.

The opinion here is McMahon will plea bargain and agree to serve a brief prison sentence. One important aspect of a plea bargain is federal sentencing guidelines which went into effect seven years ago. If

McMahon is found guilty of a crime before 1987, he can be released for good behavior after serving one-third of his sentence. If it is determined that the alleged crimes occurred after 1987, or started earlier and continued past that year, stricter federal guidelines would apply. Under those guidelines, a federal prisoner would only get one month taken off his sentence for good behavior for every year served. There is no chance for early parole. If McMahon receives a 12-to-18 month sentence, it is entirely possible he will be able to run the company from prison. It is also likely that McMahon would be sent to a federal correctional facility in the Northeast, either in Pennsylvania, Connecticut or Fort Dix, NJ, which will be the largest federal prison in the country later this year. Since McMahon would be a non-violent prisoner, he would serve his time in one of these

"country club" prisons, which do not have barbed wires or walls. At these prisons, the inmates are allowed visitors often, and have certain limited freedoms not found in most penitentiaries. There is a chance McMahon could lose Titan Towers, but that is not likely.

No matter the decision in the United States of America against Vincent K. McMahon Jr. and Titan Sports Inc. d/b/a World Wrestling Federation, it should have major ramifications on wrestling and across the entire sporting world. World Championship Wrestling has implemented a steroid policy, but it has been lax in its enforcement thereof. It is obvious to the eye that some of WCW performers are using steroids. If that is the case, why hasn't anyone been suspended? The answer

is WCW is not serious about cracking down on steroids. This is going on while the most influential person in the business is charged by the government with pushing steroids. This type of risk is allowed to be taken, when its ultimate owner is one of the most powerful men in mass media. Indeed, much like the NFL, NBA and baseball, perhaps WCW is not concerned about implementing a real steroid policy until there is a conviction, as the power of its owner gives it limited immunity McMahon was not so fortunate to possess. Hopefully, the McMahon trial will make those with influence in not only WCW, but the whole sporting world think twice about steroid consumption. Sadly, if the steroid-related deaths of athletes and the steroid-crippling of others did little to change their minds, a felony conviction will probably carry little weight.

In Perspective: Don "The Spoiler" Jardine

Don "The Spoiler" Jardine's wrestling career spans over 30 years, several countries and a few continents. In part two of this interview with Paul MacArthur, he discusses what it was like to be a young wrestler in the fifties, developing his unique style, the difference between today's wrestlers and the wrestlers of yesteryear. He also discusses Vince McMahon Sr., Lou Thesz, and other legends he met over the course of his career.

Wrestling Perspective: *How has the attitude changed in professional wrestling?*

Don Jardine: What I do see that I like is the conventions around the country honoring old time wrestlers, which I think is really nice. They had one in Seattle, one in Nashville... These people contributed greatly to our society. Wrestling has contributed to our minds, around the world. We've entertained a lot of people, we've got a lot of people up in their seats.

WP: *Do you think people are trying to put something back into the profession? Or are a lot of people just plain disgusted with*

it?

DJ: The schools that I see, they're only a mill. Just run them through, get the money, give them a few basics, throw in a few high spots, maybe a couple of clotheslines and get them out through the door. That's all I see. Our society is built on profit, but at what expense? Instead of taking 10 wrestlers or 100 wrestlers on, I try to take one and teach him the right way. But of course nobody wants to put any time in. Nobody wants to dedicate themselves to anything. That's not only in wrestling, that's the whole society.

WP: *How would you say your wrestling school is different in that regard?*

DJ: Well, I just try to teach the basics. I talk to them and if they listen, fine. If they don't.... They come from different backgrounds. I have a couple of kids I've taught, they come to my house and they sit by the pool after school and everything. I show them videos and I say, "What do you want to do? Tell me." The first thing they

say is, "well, I want to go to the WWF." Well, I say, "Goodbye." I mean, sure you'll make big money and everything. But you see now, most of the guys that are there, I don't know if it's a death wish or what you call a guy who's in the WWF because of all the drugs. They talk about the Von Erich kid (Kerry). They had a piece on him and his life (referring to the *Current Affair* piece that aired in the summer of 1993), why didn't they talk about the drugs? Drugs are what ruined that family. I was there. I was in the dressing room when they were selling out around Dallas, making big money and Kevin Von Erich would go, "What the hell, we don't need anybody but Von Erichs on this card to draw a house." So they were born with a golden spoon in their mouths and believed it. Then, when their business went down, they couldn't handle it.

WP: *Texas was notorious for being a drug problem; the deaths of the Von Erichs and Gino Hernandez and all.*

DJ: I was there. I traveled with all of them. I traveled with all the druggies.

WP: *When you were on the road, was that real discerning, having to travel with someone who may be on cocaine or who knows what else while driving?*

DJ: I couldn't stay away from it because when you're involved in the business with a program with an office. I wanted to make money and these people had the power. So I had to walk a very fine line. But, especially when you're going in a car and the people opposite you are smoking marijuana, they'd be like, "hey we're going to get you a contact high." "Well, jeez, could you open the window? I've got allergies. I'm allergic to smoke." It was depressing and it was disgusting what they were doing with their lives. I used to tell them, "if you can't go on now, what are you going to do in five years or 10 years or 20 years?" They only do it for the moment. It's just for the moments.

WP: *For all of the Von Erichs but Kevin, there wasn't 10 years.*

DJ: No, and you know the kids were good athletes. The Von Erichs were good athletes.

WP: *Do you think drugs were what ruined them?*

DJ: Oh, yes. That and their dad. They were just pushed in the wrong direction. Of course you've got the old man who wrestled all the time and the kids. I liked them, you know, but they were pushed and when somebody's pushed easy, you're not going to put anything into it. When I came up, a lot of the wrestlers from my era - the sixties, seventies and eighties - they came up the hardway. They appreciated ability. The Von Erichs were put in the right spot on the card; the main event with the champion, with Ric Flair and all the rest, and they made big money and they thought they were the ones who were drawing it. But then when the time came that they weren't pushed in the right direction, or they weren't pushed on the right match on the card, they didn't draw anything. They didn't understand, "Gee, I was a big star

and all of the sudden, now I'm nothing." Like a big baby. Of course with drugs in the whole deal, it was their pleasure. When they were on top, everybody was doing it. When they were on the bottom, the drugs were there and they were depressed and they took them.

WP: *Let's jump back to your career. What were some of the territories you worked in when you started in Canada between '55 - '59?*

DJ: Well, when I was in school, I just wrestled in the summer in parts of eastern Canada, in parts of Nova Scotia. In '59, when I went to Toronto, Ontario, I wrestled all across Canada for a couple years. Later on, I wrestled in every state, except Alaska. Little towns, big towns, jerkwater towns, things like that. I've wrestled in every major territory in the world, every major territory in the United States and Canada with the exception of Nashville, which was run by Lester Welch and Nick Gulas.

WP: *\$25 payoffs don't turn you on?*

DJ: It's not the \$25 payoffs, it's the \$10 payoffs you'd get at the end of the night. But I certainly got a lot of \$25 payoffs in my life. When I was starting out in 1955, you'd get \$2.50. That was enough for coffee and donuts. Sometimes I'd make \$10, \$12 in Toronto back in those days, even in the sixties, the guarantee was \$25 and all across the states that was the minimum, \$25.

WP: *That would increase if the house was larger?*

DJ: Well, of course. When you signed their nightly contracts, the wrestling contract, it would say right on there, \$25 and a lot of times, that's all they paid.

WP: *That's much like the WWF now. I believe it's \$50 for a television taping. That's what you're guaranteed.*

DJ: That's the way it would be when I worked for the old man (Vince McMahon Sr.), who I thought was a classy guy in the business. One of the only guys who talked to me straight. I thought he was a class act.

When I went in for six months, he said, "I want you to come in for six months and I'll put you on top. If you stay longer than six months, you'll be looking at the lights." So I went in and stayed five and a half months. When I left, he said, "I want you to come back." He wanted fresh, good talent. Before you went in, you made your tapes for over two months, did an angle and did what you had to do get over and went with it.

WP: *Who were you working with in those periods?*

DJ: (Chief Jay) Strongbow and the first time I was in with Pedro Morales.

WP: *Were they good guys to work with?*

DJ: Yeah. Well, Pedro was a little stiff because I was stiff, which I didn't mind. In fact I preferred it. The Chief, if he liked you, you were fine, and he liked me. We drew money. I did a lot of wrestling to go along with my mouth to get over, so I stayed over a lot longer. I wanted to get over on wrestling. It took two or three months to get over, but once I get over, I'm over solid.

WP: *Jim Cornette compared Bobby Eaton to Sid Vicious, saying it will take longer for Bobby to get over than it will Sid, but people will come back to see Bobby versus Sid where you see him once, that's it. Do you see it that way?*

DJ: You're comparing apples to oranges. One is doing the wrestling, one is just for shock treatment. A Friday night at shock theater. They get over for a while and they'll go on for maybe a year or two. Somebody that's more solid, more down to earth will stay over. Vicious is just shock value.

WP: *Would you say Andre was someone like that, even though Andre could wrestle a lot better than Sid?*

DJ: Andre was a good worker. In fact, I used to say in the dressing room, when people would say, "I better not stay out too long." "If some of the younger goodie, goodie wrestlers would work like Andre, we'd be drawing more money." Because

he'd work. He'd wrestle.

WP: Who were some of the best people to work with in the ring?

DJ: I liked working with Wahoo McDaniel, even though he is a crazy man. He's always got something up. But he was great to work with. He was solid. When you had a match with him, you knew you were in a match and the people also. Pedro Morales was great. I had many matches with Fritz (Von Erich). He was tough. He'd leave a lot of boot marks on your arm and your back. I used to say to him "I hope I didn't hurt your foot." There would be lace marks up and down my arms and shoulder and he'd be like, "No, you didn't hurt it." There was a lot of humor back then at that time, up through the early seventies, '75. Beyond that it changed. But there were a lot of great workers. Johnny Valentine, for example.

WP: Did you ever work with (Lou) Thesz?

DJ: I did a few times. I found him very difficult to work with. When I was just starting out, I wrestled him two or three times, but he wouldn't let you do anything. Like if you tried to grab his arm, he'd block you. He'd give you a smack, an elbow to the side of the face. He'd think that was cute. I didn't think that was right. I was a kid. I was 20 years of age, trying to make a living. These old timers, at that time, they'd discourage you. When I was in Toronto, I quit three or four times because they discouraged me. In fact, Al Costello helped me. He tells the story where they brought us over from Crystal Beach over by Gulf Grove, New York where all the wrestlers used to wrestle, took us and come in and stretch us. Come and beat me up to discourage me from getting in the business. He felt sorry for me, so I owe my career to him. All the old timers used to discourage you. The guy who used to wrestle the Garden with the loggers outfit on. When he took it off, he had a rugged body. He wrestled in the thirties and forties. He didn't have the clean lines like the guys of today: he had a lot of hair and muscle. A natural. This guy, he'd take off his shirt

and you see all the hair, "Oh God, I've got to wrestle him?" Here was a kid 19 years of age about 6'4", 225 lbs., I was terrified. Fred Atkins was notorious for beating up young wrestlers. "Where's the kid, I'll wrestle him." I wrestled him on TV one time five weeks in a row. But, every week, I'd give him a match. "Hey, let me have the kid again. I'll teach him mat wrestling." "Oh God, not again." I'd come home with scabs on my knees, nose, elbows, ears. I got the cauliflowers. Three weeks later, I'd get my booking sheet from the office. They'd laugh at me, "Your wrestling old Fred Atkins again." "Yeah, but why? He beat me up three weeks in a row." "He likes ya kid. You're aggressive." "Yeah, but four weeks in a row?" I'd get my booking for the next week. We're on TV again. By that time, I had to leave. It was him or me. But that's the way it was. They'd discourage you. I had a hard time getting into it, but I stayed.

WP: Did you find that as you got older you wanted to rough up the younger ones or make sure they knew their stuff?

DJ: Not really. I helped a lot of people. Although I did give them a change of attitude. An attitude adjustment. A lot of times, I'd have to slap them around. In order to get a good match out of somebody, I'd have to slap them around a bit. I'd stiff a little bit in order to get a good match out of them. You've got a good house, you're coming back, you're making money. The business was good enough. They were told to do something and they didn't want to do it, they'd lie down. They were notorious for that. As long as they were going over, they would fly all over the place. But if they had to do anything else, they broke an arm, a leg or a back or something. A lot of these guys needed an attitude adjustment. I'm sure they tried to give me one too. That's our business.

WP: You hear about wrestlers who resent a younger wrestlers push. Erik Watts, for example. Many wrestlers resent him because of his position and his father, and there has been talk of wrestlers changing

spots on him. Did you see a lot of that, changing things in the middle of a match?

DJ: Sure, if you're a ring general, like I was, and it's quite an honor to be called that, sure you have to change things. You have to change with different styles in matches. You have to call them as they go along and if you see something that's not right, you change it. Of course, a lot of them, they didn't want to do that, so you give them a little attitude adjustment. A kick here, a kick there. Hit them in a few places that it hurts and straighten them out.

WP: Did you find that would help in a match? Get them (your opponents) going?

DJ: Sure it would. You'd get the matches you wanted. With me, I try to keep my style and use their style to my advantage. That way, when people see me night after night, week after week, they say, "Gee, every time I see the Spoiler, he's got a different style." When a wrestler, like say a Grizzly Smith, or somebody like that had one style, I would have to come in and use my style. My different variety of things I did, like walk the top rope, jump off the rope or dropkick off the top rope and stuff like that and they'd say, "Gee, he does all this too?" You have to change. That's the way I always did it. I used other people's styles to my advantage and held onto my style as well.

WP: It used to be with the NWA Champion, that because he was the champion, he would develop a lot of different styles along the way and become more versatile as time went on. You don't see that today. There aren't many versatile wrestlers.

DJ: You know why? Actually, it happened in the old days, too. When a main eventer came into a territory, he got over with a different style. After about two or three months, you'd notice a change in all the other wrestlers doing the same thing he was. If he was using an elbow, all the other wrestlers started using an elbow, with different variations. They all did basically the same thing with variations of it. I used to watch this all the time and say, "Jeez, everybody's doing the same thing," and

the promoters wouldn't catch it. That's something I wouldn't do. When I was underneath, when I was starting out, I watched main events and I would try to incorporate a little piece that I had learned from all the wrestlers down the road, put it in my style so my style would be different. But it's true, it's very repetitious today. If you see one match, you've seen them all.

WP: When you worked in Georgia, was that under Ole Anderson?

DJ: In '84 it was. I was there, February of '84 to August of '84. Then the WWF bought out Ole.

WP: How would you compare Vince Sr. to Ole to Vince Jr.?

DJ: Ole's a screamer. I don't like screamers. I don't like being made fun of if I make a mistake or if another wrestler did. He would take you and scream in front of you and call you all kind of different words instead of taking you aside, "Gee, I didn't like that," or take you to the bathroom, or the dressing room or someplace private. But he would scream and holler at you in front of people. Now Vince Sr., he was a man that had class. He is the only promoter - and I've wrestled for every promoter and major promotion in the world - when I was at Madison Square Garden for the first time in 1972... well, one thing he used to do, any wrestler who showed up, he'd give \$50 to \$100, all of the old timers. He came into the dressing room with the booker and he started on the right hand side of the dressing room and he went around to each wrestler and shook their hand and asked how's their family and how's everything going. Most promoters come into the dressing room, they look around, look for the main eventers, go and see them and if there's any preliminary boys, they don't bother with them. But that really impressed me with him. We all kind of had our own little spot in the dressing room, and he took time for everyone. He'd say, "That was a great match." He didn't scream or holler. He had his rules, what he wanted. If you didn't do it, you were gone. But he didn't expect anything you couldn't do.

WP: How would you compare him to Jr.?

DJ: Well, Jr. I think he set a time limit for him to make so much money. That's what he's doing, "I've got five years to make 50 million dollars and I'm going to use whatever's available" to the point where it's like he doesn't care about the business.

WP: Despite growing up in it.

DJ: Right.

WP: Were there any other promoters you enjoyed working for?

DJ: I enjoyed working for Fritz. He was very stern. Paul Boesch was very good. He paid well. We used to say, "Thank God we live in Houston." We used to draw the same houses in Dallas/Ft. Worth and make more money in Houston. I'd say most of the promoters were pretty decent, compared to the later years. The Grahams were really good. Eddie Graham was good to me. I had not heard a lot of things about him. Sure, I was here for six months in '78 and could have made a lot more money and thought, "well they screwed me, but at least I made good money and I like coming in for six months, coming in on top and leaving when I'm done. Joe Dusek in Omaha, he had a nice little territory. He was good to me. A lot of guys I wouldn't care to work for again.

WP: When you were in Florida, was Dusty booking?

DJ: Yeah, I came in for him in '78.

WP: How was that?

DJ: It was excellent, because I started Dusty in Texas in '67. When they were looking for another heel, Dusty had only been working a couple of years and I said he'd be ideal for the southern towns. "Give the kid a break and put him in some of my tag teams"

WP: Did you ever think he'd go as far as he did?

DJ: Yeah, I did. He had the right attitude and he was aggressive. This is a funny business. One guy may be in a preliminary match and a real jerk and the next day he

runs the territory. Or a few years later down the road, he's a booker or he's on top somewhere and you never know him. Sometimes, we never knew each other's real name. "You've wrestled for 20 years, what's his real name?" "I don't know."

WP: I know him as Crusher.

DJ: I don't ask anything else. He doesn't ask me, I don't ask him. I traveled around. If he wants to tell me his business or his real name, where he's from, he'll tell me. I have something unique. I'm trying to start a booking office for professional wrestlers around the world. but its slow getting cooperation.

WP: What's the concept behind your booking office?

DJ: The concept is just like a talent agency in Hollywood. I work for the wrestlers, not the promoters. I have them fill out a resume, a picture and a video and I charge the wrestlers from 10 to 25 percent a booking. They are all under contract. Before they leave the ground to go anywhere, they get 50 percent of the cut. Basically, that's what it is. I work for them. It maybe a little late in the business, because the business is not that great and nobody wants to pay anything. Especially with all the independents.

WP: Are there any good young wrestlers that you see right now?

DJ: There are some good ones around here. There's Jimmy Backlund (Jimmy Del Rey in SMW) who is excellent. He's great. Another kid, Mark Starr, God, he's fantastic, about 6'2", about 225 pounds. He wrestles around here and in Japan. To me, they're great. There's a few others, but those are the two that are exceptional. Jimmy Backlund, he's had exceptional matches, I mean unbelievable matches. Brady Boone, he's a little small, but he's got a lot of good stuff. There's some other young boys, all they need is just a direction. Direction. They need experience and a place to work. They need somebody that will give them the right direction. "Do this type of match." Nobody seems to be doing

that. They don't know anything about the psychology of a match.

WP: Working a 25 minute match and keeping the attention of the crowd.

DJ: That's right. Making it interesting. I say psychology and they go "what?" "Psychology." "Well, what's that? I'm a wrestler. I went through so and so's school for three months and I can do a high spot and jump up and down and dropkick, boom and everything. But I'm only 160 pounds, but I'm a professional wrestler." Or "I'm 350 pounds, I'm a professional wrestler." Well, I go around to some of these wrestling schools here and in Texas and everything and it makes me sick to see my business, the way it's being run. I mean the guys, they've got their mother out there and their girlfriend sitting by the gym watching everything and know how the business runs. It's like Roy Shires said in San Francisco, "Leave your girlfriends, your mother, your father and your wife at home. If I find out that you bring them to the matches, you're fired." That was it. Roy Shires was very, very strict. He made lots of money. He was a screamer and a hollerer and successful. But he was a real asshole. He said, "If you bring your wife or girlfriend, you're out." I say the same thing. "If you bring your girlfriend, your mother or father to my training areas... I'm teaching you. I'm not teaching all these other people." They're sitting there like it's open class day at school. Bring your mommy and daddy and show them what you do.

WP: Jimmy Johnson, for the Super Bowl, told his parents that he did not want them in the stadium because he didn't need the distraction. Does that attitude win?

DJ: Well, that's the attitude a lot of wrestlers have. When I wrestled, they felt that if they brought their mother, father and girlfriend, wife and everything that they are trying to impress this group of people. The babyfaces, that is. The heels didn't give a damn because they were going over. "Oh, I got my wife with me, I can't do that. I've got my girlfriend." Well, too bad, buddy.

I'll beat ya right up. I'll beat you good."

WP: Did you ever work as a babyface?

DJ: Yeah, lots of times. In fact they always called me the good, the bad and the ugly because I did everything.

WP: Did you have a preference?

DJ: I liked being a heel. It's just my attitude. You go into a heel dressing room and everybody's laughing and kidding and joking and you can hear it out to the bleachers and beyond. You go into a babyface dressing room, everybody's sitting around with a depressed look on their face. "Ohjeez, I'm gonna lose tonight. What am I gonna do?" That was just one of the things I liked. I felt I got more respect as a heel. We were the ones that drew the money. I mean in fifties all the territories were built around heels. Then when the sixties, late sixties, all the boys that were main event stars from the fifties and sixties, like Von Erich, Brusier, (Wilbur) Snyder, the original Sheik, all of them were big stars, and what they did was, they bought territories and changed from a heel to a babyface. That way, it assured them that they didn't have any competition and then they featured babyfaces instead of featuring heels because the heels were very controversial and temperamental and if something didn't go right, they'd leave. Well, if I had all this money on this heel and he leaves, it's going to take me a while to build somebody back up. But if I owned the territory and I'm the babyface, everything is around me and I'm not going to leave. All I have to do is bring in about four or five different heels, and if one leaves, I've got two or three more remaining in the territory. I don't have to worry. That's where the concept came from. Just look at all the territories from Fritz, right on down. I reassured them that their territory wouldn't go under if a heel left. Certainly I did many times, in many territories. If things weren't right, "Screw you." You draw money and they put you in a preliminary match and you're making preliminary money and you figure that's your heat, your drawing power up there

and they're making the money. They bring in a friend and put him on top. It made me lose respect for people.

WP: It seems that a lot of territories died because they kept the same babyface or heel on top, like the Sheik, for too long.

DJ: Well, look at Charlotte. The guys were homesteaders. That's something I never wanted to do. I used to go into all these territories and I used to tell the guys, "Look, I'm going in to make money. I'm not coming into steal your position or your office or anything. If it takes me six months, or a year, or two years to get my money and I'll be gone. You don't have to worry that I'm going to take your position. Just let me do my thing, draw my money and you'll make money along with me. But don't stand in my way. If you do stand in my way, I'm going to bulldoze you over if I have the power." So basically, the guys in Charlotte, Mid Atlantic, they were there for 20 years. It just became a job after a while. You work with the next guy for six months, come down to the south end for six months, go back up there, you'll get a new face. Me, I wanted to move. I've got the nomad spirit.

WP: You see a lot more that way.

DJ: You see a lot more and you don't get stale. I wanted to see the country. I wanted to see different people, learn my trade. I wanted to learn all that because it's my business. Like in Hollywood, how can you be a critic if you've never been an actor, or a director, or a producer or an executive producer of a studio? Like in this business, how can a guy be a promoter or a booker if he's never been a wrestler? I see a lot of these guys who are booker, promoters, managers and everything. I get hundreds of letters and the kids that I interview, they've got their head up their ass. One kid, Mr. Hollywood I call him, he said "Well, Vince has really been losing out because I'm a lot better than the Ultimate Warrior." I said, "Well, how many matches have you had." "I've had 50." "That means you've had about 10, right? I never see you around the shows and I go to all of

the shows around Florida. I never see you there. If you don't have visibility, how do you expect to get booked?" "Oh well, ah, ah." He's trying to give me this con job. This other kid calls me up and he wants to come to the wrestling school. "Do you have the money?" "Yeah." "Well, meet me at school on Friday and we'll sign the contract." He never shows up and when I finally get a hold of him I said, "What's the problem?" "Well, I don't have the money right now, but what's this about booking? You're booking a percentage?" I said, "If you show some potential, after you get through with wrestling school, I'll book you and I take a percentage." He says, "Oh, I'll be ready in August. I've got new truck

and I'm moving out of my apartment." I said, "There's one problem, you have to learn how to wrestle first." He said, "That's no problem. I've been in Judo for 10 years and Karate. I know all that stuff." I said, "Do you watch the stuff on TV? Can you do any of that?" "Yeah, It'll take me two or three minutes." That's the general attitude. I had another kid come down from New York who didn't have any money. I usually charge \$50 an hour for a session. I said, "OK, I won't charge you anything. What do you want to do?" "Well, I've been wrestling for two years and working." So I talked to him for two hours and I guess I discouraged him because he left the next day and I never heard from

him. But I told him exactly what he had to do to make it. I mean it's great to make money. You don't make money, you don't pay your bills. I want to make money too. But I still want a little class in the business, which I always try to do. I try to have class and I try to put the business where it should be.

Next issue will feature part III of this in depth interview with one of wrestling's all time greats. Spoiler fans who are interested in obtaining Spoiler merchandise, including such items as autographed pictures, cozies, and a beautiful 16" x 20" poster spanning over the Spoiler's 30 years in wrestling, can contact Don Jardine at 3615 Westwater Avenue, Box 110, Tampa, FL 33615.

Potshots From Around The World - By Bill "Potshot" Kunkel

All The Brothers Were Valiant

"We came in from Chicago in a Learjet.
We knew we were the champions
and we weren't even here yet.
But it's not hard to know when it's all gonna be your show
so if you're smart on the Valiant Boys you'll bet.
Shiny jackets, words of wisdom written cross our backs
We live the good life in platinum Cadillacs.
And our guru, Captain Lou, well he always tells us true.
We'll be carrying home our money in laundry sacks.
Champions we are and ever shall be.
Gods to women, at least that's what the women tell me.
But these belts are hard to hold
even when you're young and bold,
so sometimes Johnny's gotta deck a referee.
We're the Valiant Brothers, we ain't no charity."

-The Valiant Story

Words and Music by Bill Kunkel © 1975

In 1973, my interest in professional wrestling reached a zenith. I was consumed by my interest in what my friends and I called "Renegade Culture." This included rock and roll (before it became the sad, corporate crap it is today), roller derby, comic books, psychotronic movies - you know, the kind of stuff they cover these days on cable's Arts & Entertainment channel.

My ex-wife Charlene, along with my partner, Arnie Katz; his wife, Joyce; and I were so entranced by the outrageousness of pro graps that we were in the planning stages of producing a newsletter, plus a magazine and a radio show sharing the name *Main Event*. This was, of course, long before the days of desktop publishing, and so the pages were typed on an IBM Selectric and laid out, in justified

columns, by hand. I wrote most of it and took the majority of the photos, from ringside at Madison Square Garden, Nassau Coliseum, Sunnyside Gardens, Westchester County Center, and other hotspots of the day.

We lived in New York City, so it made sense to concentrate on the WWWF, and we eventually worked out a deal with Harry Stevens to sell the thing at the Garden and Nassau Coliseum. Eventually we branched out to where we were shipping a couple hundred copies a month to places like the Cap Centre in Landover, Md., and the deal was always the same: a 50/50 split on the \$2 cover price. David Meltzer was a contributing editor.

In the beginning, we got great cooperation from the front office, which was somewhat more informal in those days. On the day of a Gardenshow, I subways into Manhattan early and walked several blocks from the arena to the dilapidated Holland Hotel, where the promotion (Capital Sports, I believe) kept a fleabag office on an upper floor. I'd knock on the door and usually either Arnie Skaaland or Lou Albano would be hanging out. I'd smile, show my press pass (we'd had them printed ourselves but somehow they always seemed to impress people) and they'd usually recognize me and exchange some pleasantries before peeling off a couple of backstage passes which permitted access to both the locker room and ringside.

The Holland was also a popular place for the wrestlers to stay, mainly because it was cheap. I probably conducted a hundred interviews in the greasy coffee shop. They also had some sort of gym and it was a short walk to the Garden, which was especially nice if you were a guy who had long, platinum hair.

It was a mecca for the ringrats and hardcores who were drawn to the place like flies to feces, hoping for a glance of Freddie Blassie, or a brief exchange with Hans Schroeder or Gorilla Monsoon. I remember

one day I managed to lose the ducats and spent an hour frantically wandering the streets, searching for the invaluable slips of cardboard, going crazy. I finally surrendered and went back up to the office to swallow hard and beg Albano for two more passes. To my astonishment, Blassie opened the door.

"Whaddayou want?" he asked with all his usual delicacy and charm.

"I, uh, need a couple of ringside passes, Fred."

I saw him turn toward Albano, seated in the chair, arguing on the phone. "The kid from *Main Event* needs a couple of tickets," he barked. Albano didn't blink. He just reached into his shirt pocket and took out two new passes. It felt like an episode from *The Wonder Years* I tell you.

Shooting from the ring apron at MSG was awesome. I got to hang out with the wrestlers before the show, and I had the best seat in the house once the matches started. I got to meet people like Bill Apter, George Napalitano and John Arezzi. I also got to tape interviews with Waldo Von Erich, Jay Strongbow and Bruno Sammartino.

I also got to interact with Willie Gilzenburg, who was an old-time fight guy who'd gone in with Vince McMahon Sr. Gilzenburg was old at the time, as in his arteries were becoming considerably less flexible. One time we'd meet and he'd welcome me like a long-lost son, and we'd discuss what was going on in other territories. Katz and I were even able to help sell him on the idea of bringing in wrestlers from the Florida circuit as guest stars. At least, we talked to him about it and it happened. It's hard to say what really got through to Gilzenburg and what got lost to his advancing senility. Near the end, it was rare for him to even recognize me. Suddenly, the WWWF started getting uptight about our little magazine. We were, like, totally kayfabe, with long, lurid match descriptions and

reports from around the WWWF, but they didn't own us and they didn't control us. Eventually, somebody decided that the backstage passes weren't sufficient to get us to ringside at MSG, so we had the shoot the Garden matches the following month at Nassau (they cycled the same match-ups through the Garden, then to Boston, Philadelphia, Nassau, Landover, etc., so everyone got to see them, but the Garden always saw them first). Eventually, we got tired of slamming our heads against the wall. I started writing comics and, in 1980, moved into the electronic gaming field full-time. I'll never forget the issue of DC WORLD, DC Comics' promotional magazine, where they introduced me as coming from "professional wrestling." People probably thought I had long blond hair down to my shoulder blades.

Wait a minute, I did have long blond hair down to my shoulder blades...

But to return to wrestling, even though we didn't make much money and we were cut off at the knees by the guys we were helping to hype, it was still a positive experience. I met lots of nice people and got an inside look at a world that has always fascinated me. A fellow reporter of the time, by the way, was Randy Gordon, a columnist for the Apter mags whose gimmick was that he supposedly played these locker room practical jokes on the heels. Gordon is, today, the New York State athletic commissioner.

But very best of all about those days, I occasionally got to hang out with my heroes, the Valiant Brothers. The Valiants were the greatest tag act I'd seen since the days of Killer Kowalski and Monsoon, and they had bled charisma like Three-Mile Island leaked radioactivity. In fact, it was the Valiants who keyed all of our group's interest toward graps. We loved their colorful costumes and their wild, quasi-hipster dialogue.

"Luscious" Johnny had worked earlier as John L. Sullivan, but it was "Handsome"

Jimmy who was the star when the act broke in the AWA before heading for McMahon Sr.'s territory. Jimmy was legitimately Handsome, but Johnny was a bit of a butterball. Still, he was the worker of the crew, and while neither would ever be confused with Billy Robinson, they could work a match with the best teams that ever touched a tag rope. Still, Johnny always defended his nickname. Years later, when he was doing color in the WWF with Monsoon, a young jobber named Lucius Jones appeared. Once the name appeared on-screen, Johnny went berserk: "That's my adjective!" he insisted.

I loved interviewing them. Jimmy, more or less played it straight, using the term "daddy" a lot (wrestlers are the only people I know who still say things like: "Hey, daddy, how's it goin'?" or: "Yo, Big Daddy!"), but Johnny was stand-up comic material, which is why they moved him into color eventually.

I'd ask them who their toughest opponents were and he'd go off: "Well, it could be the

Bruno Brothers, or then again it could be a couple of skycaps we ran into at LaGuardia last night; they looked pretty tough."

I never knew anyone who would blade like Jimmy. I knew about juicing and all, but it was inconceivable that the marks on Jimmy's head could have been self-induced. I remember one night at the Nassau Coliseum when he looked as if a lawn mower had run over his forehead about a dozen times. He had these ghastly, vertical gashes extending right down to his eyebrows.

"What the hell happened to you?" I'd ask.

"Aww, girlfriend got a little carried away, you know," he'd smile.

Eventually, they added "Gentleman" Gerry Valiant to the crew (who was, I believe, Bobby Heenan's legit brother), but by then the bloom was off the rose. Oddly enough, the team faded quickly into obscurity. Johnny moved toward managing and color

while Jimmy went on to become a pathetic spectacle. The last time I saw him - working in Memphis a couple of years back - he looked horrible, his pale, tattoo-covered body shriveled to nothing, his once handsome face obscured by a bizarrely dyed beard that made him look as if he were consuming a live skunk, his hair wrapped in a pirate scarf. Now he was "The Boogie Woogie Man," a sad parody of a Black wrestler.

But back in the days when I was a crazy young man, the Valiant Brothers were even crazier. Which is why I wrote and recorded a song about them, which we played on our radio show, and which appears at the beginning of this piece.

To this day, someplace in my mind, like an image from *Slaughterhouse 5*, Jimmy and Johnny continue to battle Dean Ho and Tony Garea, or Bruno and the Chief, on a regular basis. Jimmy is working on Strongbow's trapezius muscle and, try though he might, the Chief just can't quite make the tag.

Sidelines

Thanks To Jeff Cohen for the recent plug. We appreciate the support.

Son Or Pro Wrestling Sushi published by Jeff Mullins, is one of the funniest and most creative newsletters on the market. Mullins tackles interesting wrestling topics with unique humor each and every issue. Four issues of Sushi are available for \$4 and 4 SASE's to PO Box 36189, San Jose, CA 95158.

Next Issue features our year end awards, part III of the extensive Spoiler interview and would you believe there's much more? Stay tune, if your subscription expires with this issue, don't delay pilgrims, renew today.

What's Coming Up In Wrestling Perspective? • The first quarter of 1994 already looks like a good one for *Wrestling*

Perspective. Professional wrestler, painter and author of *I Was A Teenage Professional Wrestler*, Ted Lewin will be featured in a wonderful, intriguing interview. We will also feature an interview with Smoky Mountain Wrestling General Manager, Sandy Scott, and we are always working something. It doesn't stop there, as we will be featuring the best analysis and commentary from the Phantom of the Ring, Bill "Potshot" Kunkel, Michael McGowen, David Skolnick and Paul MacArthur. Of course, there's more so don't touch that remote.

The Back Issue Sale To End All Back Issue Sales has arrived and it is simple. Simply send us \$1 and we will send you two back issues, of our choosing, of *Wrestling Perspective*. Send us \$2, and we'll send you four back issues. Send us \$3, and we'll send

you six back issues and so on. Then tell two friends, who will tell two friends and so on and so on and so on. Please note all back issues will be either issue #32 or earlier.

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PHANTOM FLASHBACK - DAN PARKER

BY - THE PHANTOM OF THE RING

Today's wrestling fans are spoiled. Due to the wealth of information found in today's wrestling bulletins, there are few things in wrestling that can now be kept secret. Even the WWF has reached the point on occasion, where it was forced to tell the truth; witness the Brutus Beefcake injury or, perhaps grand jury testimony.

This wealth of information however, can blind us to the past and give us a rather narrow viewpoint of professional wrestling journalism. The reasons why we receive so much information is because, thanks to cable TV, wrestling is now a media staple and there are people actually interested in covering wrestling again. This phenomenon did not exist between 1964 to 1981, when wrestling flourished in a relative information vacuum. Now, all the newsletters of today are trying to beat each other for scoops and coming up with new ways to package what information they receive. This has led to tremendous conceit, both on the part of newsletter editors and "smart" fans. One would think that they cracked the secret of the Rosetta Stone when it comes to professional wrestling and in so doing, unearthed its buried treasures. Not so, ring worshipers. Before most of you were even a glint in the milkman's eye, there was a person who unearthed wrestling's secrets almost on a daily basis and printed it for the masses to read. His name was Dan Parker.

Parker worked for the now-defunct New York Mirror from the early thirties until the paper closed in 1963. He was columnist par excellence, who concentrated on boxing and wrestling. No one his day wrote more, or more clearly about wrestling than Parker. He knew wrestling for what it was and said it to his many readers. Parker's favorite

target, was the wrestling promoter, in particular, Toots Mondt, guru of the East Coast and the brunt of many of Parker's barbs. Consider these gems:

Last night's card at the Garden made about \$140.56, and if I know Toots, he probably played it on a daily double.

Sharing in the profits, among others, will be the Bernarr Macfadden Foundation... But if I know my Mondt, Bernarr will have to wrestle him for the Foundation's share if Tootsie boy gets to the cash till first.

It is a well known fact that there is more intrigue connected with professional wrestling than anything else, but Communism and television. Wrestling promoters hold their conventions on a spiral staircase with coats of mail under their shirts as protection against back-stabbing. In a business reeking with fakery, the most amusing thing to the outsider is the pious pretense of these cheerful rogues that the commodity they peddle is a sport, to be protected from those who would taint it.

Parker made a name for himself by not only predicting the winners of nightly wrestling matches in the morning edition, but also predicting the finish and the time of the match. Herman Hickmann wrote about Parker in his *Saturday Evening Post* expose of the business in February, 1954:

He (Parker) must have had a pipe line into our booking office because his column kept picking wrestling winners on the nose. He even got so brazen as to name the particular hold that would end a match, and the time of the fall. It became a guessing game for the powers that be to try and cross him up on the results. Sometimes his information

was so late that it was impossible to switch the outcome. The average wrestler didn't have to go by the office to get the script for the evening's show. He could read it in Dan Parker's column. I can tell you that it was very demoralizing for a young and ambitious professional.

In reality, Parker did have a pipeline into the office. That pipeline was named Jack Pfeffer. Pfeffer, who had a long standing grudge against Mondt and his cronies, fed Parker anything and everything that could be embarrassing. Pfeffer fed Parker with many interesting tidbits over the years, especially concerning Mondt. Pfeffer never forgave Mondt for forcing him out of their promotional partnership in New York during the thirties. Those who took Mondt's side in the fracas also suffered Pfeffer's wrath.

Parker's coverage went far beyond leaking the results and "who's doing what to who." He also informed his audience about the practice of blading (way back in the fifties) and about the schemes pulled by both wrestlers and promoters as they occurred. Parker covered the sport in an honest and complete way, without managing to be sucked into the "inner workings." Perhaps the fact that he worked for a newspaper had much to do with it, for if Parker were to find his sources completely shut down - a near impossibility, as any good reporter will tell you - he could then devote his time and space to other sports. The one complaint I've always had about newsletter editors is that they are completely tied to one sport for their livelihood. Thus, they often end up as either apologists for the promoters or shamefaced ballyhoosers of a particular wrestler.

I really miss Parker. Newspapers today believe themselves to be above covering something so obviously phony as wrestling in the sports pages. If they do cover it, they do so in the entertainment section, and usually by a flak for the business, so as not alienate those precious, dwindling advertising dollars. Sometimes, it's almost as if Parker never existed.

Before I take leave of this column, I offer the following trivia question. The first person to submit the correct answer will receive a one-year subscription or extension to *Wrestling Perspective* courtesy of the Phantom. Here is the question: What famous writer once covered professional wrestling for the *New York Times* in the early sixties?

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